THE TRUTHFUL FACE:
AN EXPLORATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

by

Amber L. Arends

An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of Communication and Sociology
University of Central Missouri

June 2012
ABSTRACT

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There has been a transition from newspaper to Internet personal ads over the past several years. During this time there has been limited research on solely heterosexual males self-presentation in personal ads. This study uses Goffman’s theory of face to analyze a content analysis conducted on solely heterosexual males’ most commonly self-presented categories. This study seeks to find what the most commonly presented categories are from 2008 to 2012 and if status categories continued to be the most important. In conclusion heterosexual males did continue to mention all status categories. However, interests/hobbies and personality became the most commonly self-presented elements showing a diversion from previous research.
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APPROVED:

Thesis Chair: Dr. Carol Atkinson

Thesis Committee Member: Dr. Jack Rogers

Thesis Committee Member: Dr. Joe Moore

ACCEPTED:

Chair, Department of Communication: Dr. Jack Rogers

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Dating in the United States has become an ever-challenging aspect of individuals’ daily lives due to the lack of free time for a social life. Individuals residing in the United States are the most overworked population in the world. Just counting work that is on the books and excluding those 11 p.m. emails, Americans now put in an average of 122 more hours per year than Brits and 378 hours (nearly 10 weeks) more than Germans (Bauerlein & Jeffery, 2011). The differential is not solely accounted for by longer hours, of course--worldwide, almost everyone except the USA has a right to weekends off, paid vacation, and paid maternity leave (Bauerlein & Jeffery, 2011). Because there is less time for personal concerns, such as dating, many people are turning to the Internet to find friends and companionship.

The Internet has become an integrated medium of communication in our society. People are increasingly using the Internet for school, work, and personal interactions. There were approximately 520 million people using the Internet in 2001 and 166 million of those were American (Huey, 2002). As of June 2010, there were almost 2 billion people using the Internet worldwide (Greaves, 2010). This is a dramatic increase in total Internet users from the estimated 2,000 users in 1983 (Glocal Vantage, 2004). It is estimated that the number of Internet users has doubled every 11 months since its beginning and this trend is expected to continue into the future (Glocal Vantage, 2004). Keeping in line with this trend, O3BNetworks is working on bringing another 3 billion people online (Greaves, 2010).
In just 20 years, the Internet has become one of the most common places to meet romantic partners, coming in second only to getting introductions through friends (Sohn, 2012). Match.com is one of the oldest dating sites in the United States and one of the biggest networks (Reuteman, 2010). The current number of paying subscribers using Match is approaching 1.8 million (Gelles, 2011). According to match.com there are also 5 million unique visitors to the site each month. This allows for a large network of singles to meet in this medium. The Internet allows individuals to post comprehensive personal advertisements as opposed to the limited personal advertisement sections found in newspapers. Internet advertisements aid individuals in searching for friends or companions that have more common interests because of the detail allowed in the personal ads. Not only can an individual post his/her own ad, but he/she may also view detailed profiles of others from all over the world. After locating individuals that meet one’s personal qualifications, the potential companion may be contacted through the comfort and security of one’s own home computer.

The first known online dating site, called WebPersonals.com, began in 1993 (Brunker, 2002). This was followed by match.com in 1995 (Reuteman, 2010). Before the movement to online dating occurred, newspapers were the most common location for personal advertisements. As noted earlier, with American’s work schedules lengthening and the acceptance of technology integration, the need for instantaneous information and convenient connection to it has become a necessity. With the security and the ease of Internet personals, it is estimated that one in five relationships and one in six marriages now begin online (Gelles, 2011). Though there are many motivations behind the Internet personal ads, there are three main reasons for the transition from placing personal ads in
newspapers to the Internet. The first reason is attributable to American society’s acceptance of technological advances involved with the computer and the Internet. One can access the Internet almost anywhere and it is simple to navigate. Therefore, convenience is one of the main reasons for the transformation. The second major advantage of the online personal advertisement is that many ad locations are free. Match.com has 5 million unique visitors per month, which is over 50 million a year and only 1.8 million are paid subscribers (Kauflin, 2011). The final benefit is the freedom one has to inform others about himself or herself in various response sections. Most sites allow one to go into great depths to describe what one is looking for (Burke, 2000).

Past research of newspaper personal ads has been largely limited to heterosexual ads (Andersen et al., 1993; Ayres, 1992; Miller et al., 2000; Rajeeck et al., 1991; Rajeecki et al., 2002; Strassberg et al., 2003). However, since online personal ads emerged there has been a shift in research. Homosexual dating has become the focus of many online personal advertisement studies (Bartholome et al., 2000; Burke, 2000; Gibbs et al., 2006; Russock, 2011; Smith et al., 2002; Kaufman et al., 2003a; Voon et al., 2003b).

While there has been a change in who has been studied, there has not been as much change in the theoretical perspectives used to study personal advertisements. There are two primary areas that have been studied relating to personal motivation to place an online personal ad: self-presentation (Andersen, Woodward, Spalder, & Koss, 1993; Bartholome, Bruzzone, & Tewksbury, 2000; Bolig, Stein, & McHenry, 1984; Burke, 2000; Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 2001; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gallant, Williams, Fisher, & Cox, 2011; Goode,1996b; Miller, Smith, & Trembath, 2000; Rajeeck, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991; Smith & Stillman, 2002; Voon & Kaufman, 2003b) and
communication apprehension (Ayres, 1992; Hollander, 2004; Parrott, Lemieux, Harris, & Foreman, 1997).

This study will extend research in the area of self-presentation of individuals in online personal advertisements. This area of research had been largely influenced by two theories: social exchange theory (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978) and Goffman’s theory of face (Goffman, 1959). Goffman’s theory of face strongly correlates with the ideas and concepts of self-presentation and sociocultural norms (Littlejohn, 2002). Since new Internet dating services allow for more lengthy descriptions of one’s self and what one is looking for in a companion, using Goffman’s face theory is an appropriate theoretical perspective for use to extend knowledge in the area of self-presentation in online personal advertisements.

Finally, as previously mentioned, there has been less research conducted on solely heterosexuals self-presentation, solely male heterosexuals in particular, since the expansion of the Internet in personal advertising in the mid-1990s.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Perspective

Personal ads have been the focus of study for several years. The majority of studies on personal ads have focused on the concept of social exchange, including impression management and self-presentation. Several of these studies directly relate to Kelly and Thibaut’s (1978) social exchange theory (Cameron et al., 1997; Rajecki, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991; Shtatfeld & Barak, 2009; Smith & Stillman, 2002; Voon & Kaufman, 2003b). Other studies make reference to the basic elements of the exchange process that occur in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships (Bartholome et al., 2000; Bolig et al., 1984; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Goode, 1996b; Miller et al., 2000). In both instances researchers were interested in the relationship of exchanges made by parties interested in starting relationships or locating a companion.

Exchange theory aids in the understanding of specific aspects of interpersonal relationships. It seeks to understand the basic supply/demand association between two people. Personal ads are outlines of qualities one has to offer. The ads also allow the individual to make specific requests of what qualities he/she seeks in exchange for what he/she is offering. The ads contain a blueprint of personal traits that make the use of personal ads an excellent context for understanding relational trading through the use of exchange theory. Social exchange theory is defined by its ability to negotiate interactions between individuals.
However, there are several issues with using social exchange to analyze personal advertisements. West & Turner (2004) stipulate that one issue is the limitation of the cost/rewards equation in personal advertisements. Social exchange theory projects people as calculators constantly tabulating the economics of a relationship (West & Turner, 2004). This representation makes a bold statement that humans are cognitively aware of the cost/reward decisions. Social exchange theory also fails to explain what goes on in a relationship by oversimplifying the association (West & Turner, 2004). Therefore, social exchange theory will not be used for this study.

Since the use of social exchange theory is limited in understanding to the production of personal ads, this study will use Goffman’s theory of face (Goffman, 1959) to gain insight into the self-presentation of heterosexual males. There has been a decrease in the studies of heterosexual males after the transition from newspaper to Internet personal advertisements occurred. Goffman said that individual’s public self is created by the self-presentation of the private self in the public setting. Goffman’s (1959) analysis of self-presentation is explained as a developmental process. Individuals only self-present certain aspects of themselves that are dependent on the situation. Information must be impressed on others through self-presentation in order to be valued by others (Hammond, 2009). Our public self is thereby created through our self-presentational acts through means of impression management (Goffman, 1959). A better understanding may be reached by looking at Goffman’s analysis of an individual’s front-stage and backstage self and the witness’s situational responses to self-presentation.

When one is self-presenting information he or she is constantly pulling information from his or her backstage (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, the backstage may be
seen as a place for storing self-concepts that may be brought forth during different situational interactions (Goffman, 1959). The backstage is also where aspects of the performance are assembled and/or fabricated from all aspects of self (Goffman, 1959). It is the backstage of individuals that may never be fully seen during any length of interaction, as once the stage is set the performance must be maintained to sustain the identity created.

The front-stage is what we allow others to see in each situation, otherwise seen as the performance mask (Goffman, 1959). After a situation is assessed and self-presentational aspects are selected, one will begin verbal interaction. This verbal interaction is seen by Goffman as a performance of self that has been created specifically for the situation and type of interaction that is occurring.

Those individuals who observe the front-stage presentation know that the individual will present himself as positively as possible. Therefore, the witness may divide what he observes “into two parts; a part that is relatively easy for the individual to manipulate at will, being chiefly his verbal assertions, and a part in regard to which he seems to have little concern or control, chiefly derived from the expressions he gives off” (Goffman, 1959, p. 7). Upon initial interaction the mask is chosen and the presenter is required to conform to only the chosen attributes for the remainder of the interaction in order to maintain the appropriate mask or identity (Goffman, 1959). As “interaction among the participants progresses, additions and modifications in this initial information state will of course occur, but it is essential that these later developments be related without contradiction to, and even built up from, the initial position taken by the several participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 7).
Goffman’s theory is similar to exchange theory as both involve the initial exchanging of information. However, face theory can examine one person without comparison to another person, making it appropriate for a study of an individual and not those responding to the individual (Goffman, 1959). Theory of face also states that we self present after we have collected information from others involved in the situation. After the collection of information takes place an individual will then self-present only information pertaining to the immediate situation (Goffman, 1959). In the case of online personal ads, the situation lends itself to self-presenting 2 aspects of face, namely negative and positive qualities as one works to manage the impression they wants to portray (Tsuda, 1993). Therefore the impression provided needs to be as realistic as possible so that truthful responses can be generated from potential suitors. Understanding the elements that are commonly self-presented in online personal ads has been the focus of past research (Bolig et al. 1984; Cameron et al. 1997; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Rajecki et al. 1991; Shtatfeld & Barak 2009; Smith & Stillman, 2002; Voon & Kaufman, 2003b).

Bolig et al. (1984) used a content analysis to categorize 17 different self-presentational elements and found that ad searchers’ look first to age in their selections. The researchers also found that men seek attractiveness from their potential companion in exchange for the career status and attractiveness that they possess. Women maintain a similar pattern. Cameron et al. (1997) used a content analysis to categorize eight different characteristics of ad placers. They found that the greatest stress was placed on physical traits. Deaux and Hanna (1984) also sought to find, through a content analysis, what male and female homosexuals and heterosexuals self-present. The overarching findings were that males are concerned with looks while women seek the psychological aspects of their potential
match. This study also goes a step further by identifying that there are substantial
differences between male and female homosexuals. Rajecki et al. (1991) conducted a
content analysis on men and women advertisers. They found that men stipulated looks
and women stipulated status in newspaper personal ads. Shtatfeld & Barak (2009) used
social exchange theory to define their findings on what factors (i.e. marital status, age,
level of education, income) in online profiles and authentic messages influenced
participants to initiate contact with a potential romantic partner. Smith and Stillman
(2002) concentrated on heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual women. They found that
bisexual women request and present more physical descriptors than lesbian and
heterosexual women. Voon and Kaufman (2003b) focused on the issues of race and
sexual orientation of male advertisers. They found that white men are the least likely to
have a race preference and that gay men are more likely to mention race than
heterosexual men. However, it is also important to understand how individuals are self-
presenting common elements. Only by looking at the positive and negative descriptive
characteristics used when self-presenting will there be a more complete understanding of
these self-presentational elements. Using Goffman’s theory of face, an even better
understanding of self-presentation and impression management can be reached.

History of Personal Advertisement Research

Newspaper personal advertisements were popular to study from 1980s to the mid-
1990s. By the mid 1990s, personal advertisements were being constructed on the Internet.
Studies and research on personal advertisements followed this movement and shifted
from newspapers to websites contexts. This short history section will focus on studies
done about newspaper and Internet personal advertisements. The first of these will cover
initial studies conducted on self-presentation in newspaper personal ads. The second section will cover the transitions that personal advertisement studies took when they moved from newspaper to Internet website contexts.

Newspaper/Magazine studies

Studies conducted on newspaper ads involved a wide range of contributions that laid the groundwork for the later studies of online personal advertisements. The most common group selected for study was heterosexual males and females. They were studied together and were frequently analyzed by comparing similarities to dissimilarities.

One of the most common studies conducted on heterosexual males and females in newspaper personal ads was in the area of self-presentation of sociocultural norms such as body image, appearance, and one’s successfulness (Andersen et al. 1993; Bolig et al. 1984; Goode, 1996b; Miller et al., 2000; Rajecki et al., 1991). Both Goode (1996b) and Rajecki et al. (1991) found, in their study of sociocultural elements, that males stipulated looks as the most important element in a mate while women stipulated status. Also included in the sociocultural area was a study conducted by Miller et al. (2000) that sought to find the differences of body size preferences between males and females. They found that women request a wide range of weights, yet they chose what society deems as ideal. Men request a thin partner and actually chose a wider range of sizes. Bolig et al. (1984) used social exchange to define a content analysis on magazine articles searching for sociocultural elements. Finally, Andersen et al. (1993) sought to find what characteristics male and female ad placers desired in their potential partner in terms of height, weight, and shape; they found stereotypical information given for both. Males
described themselves as tall, fit, and of average weight, while women stated that they were petite or tall, fit, and with significantly less body weight then ideal.

Internet studies

The groups being studied in personal advertisements were modified after the transition to Internet personal ads took place. There was far less investigation into heterosexual males and females as individual entities and more investigation into gay and lesbian personal advertisements or inclusive studies conducted on both heterosexual and homosexual advertisements. Russock (2011) sought heterosexual information in conjunction with homosexual. He analyzed print and online media to determine mate selection criteria in heterosexual and homosexual males and females. Gibbs, Ellision & Herino (2006) constructed a survey to analyze heterosexual and homosexual ad placers self-disclosure using a dimensional formula of honesty, amount, intent and valence. They determined those who seek face to face interaction or a long term relationship were more likely to be honest and that 94% felt they were honest in their self-presentation. Even though the type of group that was studied changed, the use of exchange theory had not. This theory was still being used to seek information about sociocultural norms of traits to supply to the public.

Shtatfeld & Barak (2009) used social exchange theory in their analysis of married, divorced and single ad placers. They found that the self-presentational factors of marital status and level of education were significantly more important than income level and physical appearance. Smith and Stillman (2002) studied what heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual women desire in a partner and what they believe others desire in their partners. They discovered that bisexual women provide and expect in return the most
physical descriptions, while lesbians want and require the least. Voon and Kaufman (2003b) analyzed heterosexual and homosexual males in Internet personal ads. They focused on what effect race had on sexual orientation preferences. They found that gay men are more likely to mention race than heterosexual men, and that homosexual black and Hispanic men are less likely to have a race preference. They also conducted a study (2003a) on what effects age has in date selection among gay and straight men in Internet personal ads. Their findings indicated that homosexual males were more likely to have an age preference than heterosexual males. However, both heterosexual and homosexual males desire younger partners as they mature in age.

As the use of Internet personal advertisements grew, the variety of studies conducted spanned a larger area. There were studies conducted exclusively on homosexual males. These studies covered subjects ranging from safe sex (Smith, 2000) to what homosexual males generally emphasize in their self-presentation and the importance of personal appearance (Bartholome et al., 2000). Bartholome et al. (2000) found themes in the use of “genital language, sexual roles, sexual acts, body language, race, and age” (p. 309) in men using male phone ads. Smith (2000) found that only 10% of ads contain references to “safety,” and that this percentile did not change from 1985 to 1996. Alterovitz and Mendelsohn (2009) examined Internet personal ads from 4 age groups to see if evolutionary theory held true for companions meeting later in life. Gallant et al. (2011) examined photographs from male and female online personal ads to determine if the ad placer was aware of their presentation of sex-specific mating strategies.

Studies conducted on lesbian Internet personal ads were closely related to the self-presentation aspects covered in gay male studies. Burke (2000) looked to the use of
online personal ads as a way for lesbians to create a form of self-definition through interaction and self-presentation. What one chooses to disclose while self-presenting are aspects of sociocultural norms, which creates one’s self-definition. Specifically, Burke (2000) found that two-thirds of lesbian ad placers were looking for meaningful relationships and that many wanted to be geographically connected to other lesbians.

Ultimately, as research of personal ads on the Internet expanded, there were few studies associated with solely the heterosexual population. There was some limited research on heterosexual females. Strassberg and Holty (2003) sought what type of female was most often contacted by males. This study calculated responses to personal ads based on key words that were tied to what researchers believed to be common sociocultural norms. They found that the most commonly sought after female advertiser was one that is “financially independent, successful and ambitious” (p. 253), which contradicted their prediction and past research. However, there has been limited research conducted solely on self-presentation of heterosexual men in an online Internet context.

Research Questions

Research over the past 10 years has trended away from solely heterosexual male studies toward homosexual or joint homosexual and heterosexual studies. This caused a deficiency in the amount of information generated on solely heterosexual males self-presentation in the medium of online personal ads.

This study will expand the understanding of how heterosexual males present their “face” to heterosexual women in an online setting. Specifically, it will answer the following questions:
RQ1: What are the most prominent sociocultural elements of self-presentation for heterosexual males in United States online personal ads?

RQ2: Did heterosexual males continue to present themselves based on status, “i.e. income, occupation, residence” as given evidence in the previous studies? And has that presentation changed in the past four years?
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study will do two things: 1) conduct a content analysis on 200 free on-line personal ads from the Internet dating service, match.com from 2008; and 2) conduct a secondary content analysis on 20 free on-line personal ads from the Internet dating service, match.com 2012, to ensure whether or not the presentation process has changed.

Section 1

The study will analyze how heterosexual males across the United States present themselves through the medium of online personal ads in one time in history, 2008. The study will specifically focus on the free response section of personal ads. The decision to use a content analysis as the method of measurement was reached based on past research studies conducted on newspaper and Internet personal advertisements (Bolig et al. 1984; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Montini & Ovrebo 1990; Rajecki, 2002; Rajecki et al. 1991; Smith, Stillman, 2002; Strassberg, & Holty, 2003). According to Goode (1996a), “Many, probably most, of the writings that deal with personal advertisements are based on a content analysis of the ads themselves” (p.16). Content analysis methodology can be used to select and measure specific types of sociocultural norms related to personal information. This methodology will cover the texts to be analyzed, the questionnaire used to conduct the content analysis, and the procedure of the content analysis.

Online Personal Advertisement Texts

There were N=200 texts that will be analyzed for this study. Online personal advertisements typically contain two sections: online ad agency prepared statements and
a freelance response section where the individual can self-present in a more personal way to meet potential companions.

For this study, the freelance section of the personal ad will be the only part analyzed. This section was chosen because it is where the ad placer has the opportunity to create the most accurate self-presentational depiction. The freelance section analyzed was titled “About me and who I’m looking for.” This section allows individuals to write about anything they would like others to know about themselves and what they are looking for in a potential companion. It is not only the place where the ad placer has the most freedom in the ad, but it also allows for the most truthful portrayal of the individual as he perceives himself within their sociocultural elements. This is seen as the most truthful self-portrayal because there is no preset category to select from.

A combined total of 220 personal advertisement texts will be randomly selected from across the country using the free online personal ad site, match.com. There were four locations chosen, one within each of the United States four Census Bureau’s (East Coast, South, Mid-West, and West Coast). The cities in each location were selected by establishing the largest metropolitan cities in each region based on the 2000 US Census and conducting a random selection using the random selection tool located in Microsoft Office Excel. The ad selection search was conducted with a 75-mile radius of each major metropolitan area so that both urban and rural ad placers were encompassed. Then the total number of ads that were located in each region using match.com search criteria, woman seeking male, aged 25 through 45 and the zip code that was most centralized to the metropolitan area, were then sorted using the random selection tool located in Microsoft Office Excel. There were a total of 55 texts selected from each area to supply
pre-coding training (20 texts) and the final coding texts (200). The same selection criteria were repeated for the secondary study in 2012 of 20 texts.

_Coding Scheme for Personal Ads Freelance Section_

Since the section being analyzed is a freelance section (defined here as spaces where the ad placer can add information he or she wants to add), there is a need to create specific categories to be coded. The categories to identify individual characteristics for this study were selected from Bolig et al. (1984) and Cameron et al. (1997) studies. Bolig et al. (1984) used the following categories:

- Income
- Education
- Job/Career
- Personality
- Height

Cameron et al. (1997) used these categories:

- Personality
- Appearance
- Education
- Occupation
- Financial Status

- Weight
- Attractiveness
- Photo
- Activities/Interest
Some of these categories were renamed and in some cases combined to more accurately define specific areas of heterosexual male self-presentation. The following categories and their definitions will be used for this study (Anderson et al., 1993; Bolig et al., 1984; Cameron et al., 1997; Rajecki et al. 1991;):

- **Body**: This includes any words describing the individual’s body from the neck down, including such aspects as profile (non-facial), size, and shape.
- **Looks**: This category of words describes the area above the neck or the facial area including appearance, hair, smile, etc.
- **Personality**: This category will include words that describe how the individual or his friends perceive him to act in public or private, including reserved, outgoing, comical, etc.
- **Occupation**: This category includes any words describing an individual’s career, whether it is past, present, or in the future. This may also include an individual’s work goals, where he sees himself in the future and what he is working toward.
- **Income**: This category includes words describing the level of income. If there is not an income level given, it may also be discovered through the amount and type of expenditures or things the person buys. This may include cars, bikes, trips, etc.
- **Intelligence**: This includes words describing how smart he is or the level of education he has.
- **Interest/Hobbies**: This includes words describing participation in a group or individual activities, or perhaps events he participates in outside of the workplace.
- **Photo**: The category means the picture he provided for the ad.
• Residence: This includes anything describing the structure (house, apartment, loft, etc.) and location where he lives.

Appendix A includes the words and definitions that will be used for coding. Following that is Appendix B, which contains the initial coder instructions.

Each category being analyzed is important to the concept of self-presentation in Internet personal advertisements. As discussed before, this study intends to find how words from each category are being used in self-presentation (whether they are positive, negative, or neutral) and which category has the highest number of uses. The positive, neutral, and negative element will allow us to illustrate how each category is being self-presented by the ad placer. If they present themselves as being good looking this would be positive. If they were to present themselves as average it would be considered neutral. If they presented themselves as being unsightly this would be considered negative. All categories will be evaluated based on how they are being presented. A secondary example would be an ad placer stating that he may not have much but it is enough. This would be a positive Income statement. Even though a potential mate can deduce they do not have much in the way of financial means it is presented positively. Finding what types of categories ad placers are self-presenting and how they are presenting this information will give a concise examination of what face the ad placers are trying to present to their potential companions.

As discovered in past research concerning heterosexual males and females, males have a tendency to develop an aura of status (Goode, 1996b; Rajecki et al. 1991). Heterosexual women are found to stipulate status as being the most important element they are seeking in a partner (Goode, 1996b; Rajecki et al. 1991). Rajecki et al. used
social exchange theory to show how women lacking social or economic power seek men who have power as given evidence in their status listing. Men will then seek a mate with good looks or physical beauty in exchange for the power they possess. Goode (1996b) also found that men seek beauty in their potential mates and women seek status in theirs. This information was supported in studies using social exchange theory. Goode (1996b) placed false ads into newspapers and journals and documented the responses to each ad. Both Goode and Rajecki used different studies yet gathered similar results

This study seeks to find if this trend for heterosexual males continued into 2008 and how men were at that time displaying their status. Rajecki et al. (1991) described status as anything that relates to material possessions and social esteem. Based on the understanding of past studies and using this word to represent several categories in this study--occupation, income, and residence --should be sufficient to answer these questions.

Procedure

Training coders

There were three coders selected for the initial study, all students from a mid-sized university in the Mid-West. Upon accepting the position, each member was given a practice coding sheet, the categories with definitions, and the test articles. After a review of the materials, each coder was allowed to ask questions before proceeding to the test articles. Each coder then began to code 20 personal ad texts that were from the pre-selected practice group of texts. The results from the test period discovered any discrepancies with the coders and were resolved before moving on. There was a clear understanding of all definitions and of how to use the coding sheet. No changes were needed in order to continue coding of the final articles.
Coding Procedure

After training was completed the remaining 200 articles were distributed to each coder along with coding sheets. Each coder began with the same region and once completed they totaled their coding sheet. Once all the coding for that region was complete, the coders proceeded to the next region and repeated until all four regions were completed.

Section II

This section will serve as an update to the 2008 content analysis, selecting five ads from each geographical area using the same methodology as the initial study. A content analysis will be conducted on these ads to see if heterosexual male ad placers continued to present status categories as their most important attributes and if the most self-presented category remains unchanged.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

Section I

After all four regions were coded; a reliability estimate was calculated using a goal of 95 percent confidence. It was determined that the reliability estimates were 100 percent. The results of the content analysis are listed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Content Analysis Results- Section I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>0.0037</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks</td>
<td>0.0067</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>0.3524</td>
<td>0.0069</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>0.0457</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.0016</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>0.0184</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests/Hobbies</td>
<td>0.4387</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>0.0817</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>0.0282</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>0.9770</td>
<td>0.0105</td>
<td>0.0125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interests and Hobbies were the most commonly presented category at 44.14%. Ad placers went into great detail as to what they were involved in and what they enjoyed doing in their life outside of work. A majority of the presentation in this category was positive; however, the negative presented elements were the second highest out of any negative category. Items that were negatively presented were occasionally listed as something the ad placer enjoyed doing that may not be socially accepted or as something they may like to do in excess. For example an ad placer might admit they enjoyed going to bars and clubs on a regular basis and "get wasted" all the time. The ad placer would then state that he knew this is something he needed to change or note he should not be doing so much of it.
Personality was the second most self-presented category with a total of 36.78%. Ad placers presented many diverse masks and which stages they were comfortable presenting them on. Whether the presentation was a polished personality in society’s upper crust or a casual personality in a sports bar drinking, ad placers wanted their potential companions to know how they would perform in different circumstances. Perhaps this category had the most neutral and negative presented elements because the ad placer wanted to state under what conditions he would be most effective and/or least comfortable as individual’s personalities may not fit into all social settings.

The third most presented category was the Photograph used by the ad placer. Individuals could choose to provide or not provide a photo. Every ad reviewed for this study did contain a profile picture and each was a positive presentation for a total 8.17%. Every ad placer appeared to try to leave a potential companion with a realistic and representative view of himself.

The fourth most described category was Occupation totaling 4.7% with positive, negative, and neutral self-presentation. There was very limited negative and neutral presentation leaving 4.57% positive. This supports previous research that heterosexual males self-present positively when related to their ability to provide for a potential companion.

The fifth most presented category was Residence, which contained only positive elements in relation to what type of home and/or where it was located. Ad placers revealed 2.82% positive staging. These findings also support previous research stating that heterosexual males will self-present a positive status.
The sixth most offered category was Intelligence with 1.84% positive, .08% neutral, and .08% negative presentation. Ad placers noted both the education they had received from universities or from the family business and/or overall intellect they posses in this category. A total of 2% of all self-presented items were contained in this section.

The seventh most offered category was Looks, being presented .75% by ad placers and only as positive and neutral. Perhaps with the ad placers ability to include not only a profile photos and several other photos they felt that additional description of their looks was not warranted. Under this same assumption, negative connotations would also not be necessary as any potential companion could deduce information directly from the photos provided.

The eighth self-presented category was Body. Only positive and neutral elements were self-presented in this category with a total of .41%. The individual ad placers that wanted to show off different aspects of their bodies were able to do it with photographs rather than written descriptions specific to looks.

The ninth and least self-presented category was Income in this study. Ad placers presented .16% positive, .04 % negative and .04 % neutral for a total of .24%. There was little information that would lend itself to the income of ad placers beyond stating that they were either very successful or found that other areas of life were more important than making money.

In answer to the first research question, this study found heterosexual males self-presented two items in Internet personal advertisements by an overwhelming majority. Interests and Hobbies were the most self-presented category and the second was Personality. Combined, more than 79% of these two categories were positive. An
additional .12% was neutral and .08% negative. This accounts for 81% of categorized elements. The heterosexual males in this study self-presented Interests and Hobbies an average of 16 times per ad. They listed out their Interests and Hobbies as important elements to their everyday life, like going biking after work, to art galleries or important charities they contributed time to. They also listed these elements as goals for future life aspirations such as traveling or participating in a specific marathon. They self-presented these elements in a way that revealed they wanted a companion with current similar interests so their lives could more easily meld together or at the very least have someone that would be supportive of their Interests and Hobbies. The ad placers Personality was presented on average 13 times per ad. They self-presented these items to stress the diversity of faces they were capable of wearing. This category stipulated the vast number of stages the ad placer was comfortable presenting on. They would state a scenario where they could take a dirt bike to the desert in the morning and attend a black tie gallery opening in the evening. Presenting a multifaceted life was evident in most ads.

In answer to the second research question, the content analysis found that heterosexual males self-presented a small amount in every status category. Approximately 9% revealed a positive self-presentation in the categories of Income, Occupation, and Residence. Only .12% self-presented a neutral status and .08% negative. Ad placers made reference to status categories, on average, three times per ad. Occupation and Residence were presented significantly more than Income. The majority of ad placers still presented their Occupation and Residence in a positive manner whether it was based on location, type, or quality. Even though heterosexual male ad placers
continued to positively self-present status categories they did not present these categories as a primary depiction as previous research suggested they would.

Section II

The second content analysis was conducted in 2012 on an additional 20 texts and the results are listed below in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Content Analysis Results- Section II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>0.0085</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>0.2936</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>0.0596</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.0085</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>0.0426</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests/Hobbies</td>
<td>0.4723</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>0.0851</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>0.0085</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.9830</td>
<td>0.0085</td>
<td>0.0085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The secondary study conducted was methodologically identical with one exception. Only one coder was used to analyze the 20 personal ads. The freelance section on match.com was not altered since the original content analysis in 2008 and the 20 articles for 2012 were taken from the same four regions (East Coast, South, Mid-West, and West Coast) using the identical search criteria.

Results from the 2012 were consistent with the 2008 study. The most commonly self-presented category was Interests and Hobbies totaling 47.23 % positive and less than 1% neutral and negative. Heterosexual males continued the tendency of presenting what they enjoyed doing on a daily basis as well as future goals and aspirations.

Personality was the second most self-presented category with a total of 29.36 % positive and less than 1% neutral and negative. Interest/Hobbies and Personality were the
only two categories that contained negative and neutral presentation which was often
stated as doing something in excess which may not be socially acceptable. These two
categories contained 78.3% of all self-presented elements.

The third most presented category was Photo containing 100% positive results at
8.51%. Each ad contained a photograph of the ad placer in an agreeable setting and
illustrated standard features such as a pleasant smile or facial expression.

The fourth and fifth most self-presented categories were Occupation and
Intelligence with 5.96% and 4.26% remaining consistent 2008 finding. Most ad placers
stated items of Occupation as doing what they set out to when they started their education
or not using the education they received in any way. Intelligence was primarily presented
in a statement of what type of degree or level of education they received.

Body, Income and Residence were all self-presented at an equal .85% each.
Income was never mentioned as an actual dollar amount, rather as a statement of being in
a place where the ad placer could start achieving their lifelong dreams or goals.
Residence was listed as in a good location or as comfortable.

Looks were the least self-presented category in the 2012 study at .43%. Since
every ad contained a positive profile photo the assumption remains the ad placer wishes
the respondent to assess their looks.

In answer to the first research question, this study found heterosexual males
continued to self-present two items in Internet personal advertisements by an
overwhelming majority. Interests and Hobbies were the most self-presented category and
the second was Personality. Combined, more than 76% of these two categories were
positive. An additional .85% was neutral and .85% negative. This accounts for 78.3% of
categorized elements. Heterosexual males continued to self-present Interests and Hobbies as important elements to their everyday life. They also stressed the importance of their potential mate enjoying similar Interest/Hobbies or open to them in the future. The ad placers Personality continued to be presented in a way that showed the diversity of faces they were capable of wearing including what stages they would be comfortable presenting on.

In answer to the second research question, the 2012 study found that heterosexual males continued to self-present a small amount in every status category. Approximately 8% revealed a positive self-presentation in the categories of Income, Occupation, and Residence. No ad placers that presented any neutral or negative elements in these categories. Occupation was presented significantly more than Income and Residence which was a slight change to 2008 finding. Even though heterosexual male ad placers continued to positively self-present status categories they did not present these categories as a primary depiction as previous research suggested they would.

Section I and II Analysis

This study sought to find the most commonly self-presented elements in heterosexual males' Internet-based personal advertisements in 2008 and 2012. Subsequent to past research, a content analysis was conducted to evaluate how often an ad placer would self-present specific categories. It was the expectation of this study to determine which categories are currently most self-presented given the large amount of information currently permitted in the freelance section. This study attempted to establish if ad placers’ trends found in previous studies would continue.
Though this study was able to depict the categories set forth it offered the following limitations and issues. It could not fully explain why there was a move away from self-presentation of status. Though status categories were still present and supplied in a positive manner, Interests/Hobbies and Personality replaced the previous status categories as a majority cannot be assessed. This study only covered the initial front stage presentation in online personal ads.

As noted, Goffman's theory addresses the belief people present only certain aspects of themselves depending upon the situation and society's expectations. We attempt to manage our image, continually pulling from our backstage self, our storehouse of potential "me’s". As this study demonstrated, status continued as an important element to heterosexual males. However, status presentation was circumvented in 2008 and 2012 by self-presentation of Hobbies and Interests. What has changed? The economy is one of the most dominant issues that surfaces--today jobs or careers are unpredictable and unstable. Hobbies and Interests are ways to identify oneself without showing a lack of career or a less than desirable job. If it isn't the economy, then a variety of variables could emerge--the media and its focus on entertainment (perhaps self-entertainment through hobbies), or the eco-friendly, back to basics approach to advertising where it's notable to be "green" and nature loving. But that is pure conjecture. To find the answer to this focus change in self-presentation another study would need to be conducted using personal interviews or perhaps a survey.

However, this limitation does reveal Goffman's perceived process--the ad placers have set the stage and must play it out. In 2008 and 2012, ad placers activities serve as their "face" and the stage must be played out with the dates they gather from match.com.
Newspapers only allow for a few lines of abbreviated information. The amount of information allowed in online personal ads is much greater (Burke, 2000). Giving the presenter the self-determination to present one's sociocultural elements in more detail may allow for a greater understanding of the presenter. The masks a presenter chooses to use given the space must be an accurate portrayal as “a personal ad may add to the projections but never contradict the image initially set” (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 152). This explains why individuals self-present both positive and negative qualities in online personal ads. They may add to their self worth but can never take back and admit that they are not something they claimed to be. This is because individuals usually only present the finished product (Goffman, 1959).

There are more multimedia apparatuses in the medium of Internet dating than covered in this study. As these tools have entered and evolved over the past several years the freelance section has remained unaffected. Since Internet dating allows the ad placer to write up to four thousand characters in the freelance section they are able to set their front stage with information derived from their back stage as desired. The ability to set the stage portraying only desired self-concepts the ad placer can create an ideal impression for attracting a preferred companion. All ad placers wore similar masks while self-presenting a socially accepted impression through the medium of Internet personal advertisements. Though the ad placer could discuss anything of importance this study ascertained (2008 and 2012) heterosexual males sustained a positive self-presentation of
Occupation, Income, and Residence therefore continuing the aura of status in past research.

Though the trend of self-presenting status continued on a limited basis (2008 and 2012), heterosexual males leaned not only more toward positive than originally anticipated, but were overwhelmingly partial to the self-presentation of Interests/Hobbies and Personality. With the additional space to present oneself, ad placers set the stage or impress what life would be like with them rather than a simplistic impression of status past studies have established. The heterosexual male can explain what he does on a daily basis that allows a potential companion to visualize how she would fit into the ad placer’s life. Potential companions perceive the numerous performance masks the ad placer is capable of wearing without actually seeing the stage in motion. The ability to wear multiple masks in their personal and professional lives shows a level of social esteem not previously noted in studies conducted on personal advertisements.

In conclusion this study reveals a movement away from initial personal ad research stating heterosexual male self-present status as the most relevant factor. It reveals the most self-presented elements were Hobbies/Interests and Personality. Self-presenting Hobbies/Interests and Personality may be the new norm in the online medium match.com factors, which have not changed from 2008 to 2012.
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APPENDIX A
CATEGORIZATION AND CREATION
OF CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

The categories that will be analyzed in each personal ad are as follows:

- **Body**- Anything describing the individual’s body from the neck down including such aspects as profile (non-facial), size, and shape.
- **Looks**- Anything describing the area above the neck or the facial area including appearance, hair, smile, etc.
- **Personality**- Description of how the individual or his friends perceive him to act in public or private including reserved, outgoing, comic, etc.
- **Occupation**- Anything describing to an individual’s career whether it is past, present, or future. This may also include an individual’s work goals, where he sees himself in the future and what he is working towards.
- **Income**- Anything describing the level of earning mentioned. If there is not an income level given it may also be discovered by the amount and type of expenditures the individual makes. This may include cars, bikes, trips, etc.
- **Intelligence**- Anything describing how smart he is or the level of education he has.
- **Interest/Hobbies**: Anything describing participation in group or individual activities or events outside of the workplace.
- **Photo**: The picture provided in the ad
- **Residence**: Anything describing the structure (house, apt, loft, etc.) and/or location of where he lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Looks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intelligence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interests/Hobbies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photo</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please follow the proceeding steps carefully:

1) Read through each of the specific categories and definitions. If there are any questions about the meaning or what all may be included please ask for assistance.

2) After thoroughly reading through the categories and definitions, review the coding sheet. As you can see there will be three areas (positive, negative, neutral) to place information described in the texts.

3) Next, it is important to understand how to use the coding sheet. After completely reading through the personal advertisement mark the appropriate column (positive, negative, neutral) for each element mentioned. If the ad placer repeats the same item twice only count it once. If the ad placer repeats the same item in a different manner (positive, negative neutral) then count it twice.

4) At the conclusion of coding all the ads in one region, total the coding sheet and turn into the group leader.

5) Repeat for all four regions.